

Claritin Approved for OTC Status

Pending approval by the FDA, loratadine (Claritin), a popular non-sedating antihistamine, is slated to receive over-the-counter (OTC) status by the end of the year. OTC medications are those that can be obtained without a prescription. Some popular OTC drugs that you may be familiar with are Tylenol, Benadryl, Sudafed, and Advil.

Claritin, which has been available only by prescription since 1993, is indicated for the relief of nasal and non-nasal symptoms of seasonal allergic rhinitis and for the treatment of hives. The switch from prescription to OTC status will affect all strengths and dosage forms of Claritin to include the following:

- Claritin tablets
- Claritin Reditabs
- Claritin Syrup
- Claritin-D
- Claritin-D 24-hour Tablets

How will the switch of Claritin to OTC status affect you if you are a Military Health Service Beneficiary? For those of you who obtain your prescriptions from a military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacy, there will probably be very little change. This is because for the last 18 months, Claritin has generally not been available through the MTFs. Instead of Claritin, you have probably received either fexofenadine (Allegra) or cetirizine (Zyrtec) if you have needed an antihistamine with low-sedating properties.

You may have been getting prescriptions filled for Claritin products at the national mail order pharmacy (NMOP) or a retail network pharmacy. TRICARE rules generally provide coverage only for prescription medications at the NMOP and retail network pharmacies. OTC drugs such as Tylenol, Benadryl, Sudafed, and Advil are excluded from the benefit. Once Claritin officially switches to OTC status, Claritin prescriptions will no longer be filled as a covered benefit through either the retail network pharmacies or NMOP. This includes any refills that may have been left on your prescription.

Several options will be available for you if you are using Claritin at the time when it is switched to OTC status:

- If you want to continue using Claritin you will no longer need a prescription to obtain it. However, you will need to purchase it in the same manner that you purchase other OTC medications. All current prescription dosage forms and strengths will be available over-the-counter. Pricing for the OTC product has not yet been released by the manufacturer but will probably be higher than most of the OTC antihistamines currently available.
- You may want to obtain a prescription for a different second-generation antihistamine that is covered by the TRICARE pharmacy benefit. These include the prescription medications Allegra, Clarinex, and Zyrtec. Each of these medications has been demonstrated to be safe and effective for the treatment of allergic rhinitis and hives. The DoD has a contract with the manufacturer of Allegra that allows the DoD to provide Allegra through the MTFs and NMOP at a significantly lower cost than Clarinex or Zyrtec. As always, you and your healthcare provider should make decisions regarding the best course of treatment for your condition.